Annual Assessment of Network Rail's stakeholder engagement April 2023 to March 2024

3. Eastern

Summary of performance

Eastern provided a good demonstration of its stakeholder engagement and has responded well to last year's assessment and its recommendations. The region provided evidence of building on last year's assessment and reflected on how to improve their processes. This included several examples of sharing best practice approaches between its routes and partners.

There is a range of best practices examples that have been provided by Eastern, and we encourage other business units to consider how they could apply them to their activities.

Eastern could have provided more information as to how it engages with its freight customers. The region could have also provided more detail of how their stakeholder engagement impacted day-to-day business decisions and outcomes.

Performance by principle of stakeholder engagement

Effective

Eastern provided strong examples of where engagement had been conducted proactively in a timely manner to influence the design of a plan or decision. The engagement was conducted using a range of methodologies and tools including regular meetings, forums, pulse surveys, formal governance groups, working groups, and tailored approaches for different situations.

The region provided examples where its engagement with stakeholders has resulted in identifying the best approach to respond to an issue, including adjusting or deferring plans where necessary. In these instances, there is a clear demonstration that they understood stakeholder feedback and used it to inform business priorities. We would encourage Eastern to ensure this is embedded into all decision-making. While there were instances where the region has followed up on feedback, or used initial feedback to establish ongoing mechanisms, there is less evidence of fully closing the loop in terms of reporting back to stakeholders the outcome of any action or decision.

Eastern has run 'Focus Weeks' to target localised train performance. Lines of route which have been underperforming are identified, with detailed analysis of train performance on the route carried out and shared with stakeholders. Each Focus Week remains responsive to stakeholder needs and has its own dedicated plan in which feedback, recommendations, actions and improvements are tracked.

Eastern demonstrate a strong sense of understanding the 'point' of stakeholder engagement. This makes the ultimate output better for everyone and the journey to getting to a decision less painful for all.

Consumer Expert Panel

Inclusive

The stakeholder mapping exercise clearly demonstrated that thought had been given to all stakeholder types, including third parties such as emergency services and local taxi operators. This was undertaken at a regional level throughout the CP7 engagement process and has subsequently informed route and regional approaches to engagement. It was encouraging to see that Eastern

has measured the success of its engagement, through surveys and maturity models, covering both large and small stakeholder groups.

Eastern's approach to stakeholder engagement has continued to utilise a variety of communication methods. It provided evidence of using both in person and virtual forms of verbal and written communications, approaching the needs of stakeholders in considered and inclusive ways. In order to continually improve, Eastern could place more consideration on how to engage a broader diversity of disengaged stakeholders (e.g. socio-economically disadvantaged groups, rural communities, digitally excluded and non-native speaking individuals).

Transparent

Eastern has embedded transparency within its engagement processes around data sharing, accessibility and good communication. The West Yorkshire Stations Alliance formed of Network Rail, train operating partners and government has collated a single source of shared data between for all stations in the West Yorkshire area. This includes current accessible facilities and planned works, with data to assess footfall, planned works and socio-economic information. Working together, the Alliance has identified £250m for expenditure on stations in West Yorkshire over the next six years.

During the CP7 business planning process, individual, project and regional level workshops were held with relevant stakeholders to explain plans, reflect stakeholder requirements where possible, and ensure alignment with initiatives planned for the control period.

Eastern acknowledged where things have not always been as good as they had hoped. This included their response to Storm Babet in October 2023. It commissioned consultants to review the rail industry response to the storm. The report included 39 recommendations, with East Coast route tracking each recommendation as part of a Storm Babet Action Plan. The recommendations were also shared with Eastern region colleagues to promote system learning from the incident and a chance to identify what opportunities exist to improve the industry's decisions during significant disruption to provide a better passenger experience in the future.

Well-governed

Eastern provided strong evidence relating to its governance processes, there are various examples to demonstrate that there is measured, regular engagement across a range of different stakeholders. Regular polling and research are undertaken to ask range of stakeholders what they

think and used to inform future plans.

The region's North & East Route and train operator Northern, took part in the pilot of the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) Customer Experience Maturity Model (CXMM) to assess current customer experience activity. This provided a detailed assessment of maturity, highlighting key areas for improvement including passenger information and satisfaction. There is a follow up piece of work underway to assess the impacts of business plans on CXMM, identify gaps and to share external best practice.

Good practice from self-assessment submission

School Engagement on Safety (inclusive): Leeds safety week, which was held at Leeds Station in May 2023 saw 600 students attend a collaborative event with Northern, CrossCountry, TPE, LNER, Leeds United FC, BTP, Railway Children, Samaritans and RSSB to highlight the importance of safety by the railway.

Kingsbury Road bridge closure (well-governed, transparent): A bridge in North London needed to be closed at short notice. Eastern's engagement was quick and effective, running site visits, liaising with council teams for media responses and arranging alternative residential accommodation during particularly noisy periods of the works. After stakeholder feedback, the diversionary route was amended to better serve the local community.

Recommendations

Activity to continue or build on

Eastern should continue to consider how to evidence and articulate the impact of its stakeholder engagement activities.

Eastern should continue to build on the positive examples provided through its 'Focus Weeks', with a priority on consistently reflecting on the lessons learned and taking forward any committed actions.

Areas requiring improvement

The region should consider how to embed stakeholder feedback into its business decision-making

processes.

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